March 23, 2016

Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)
State Board of Education
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Commissioners and Board Members:

The Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Silicon Valley, representing the organized Jewish community of Santa Clara County, feels strongly compelled to join our voice to the concerns expressed in the Interfaith Coalition Letter regarding the depiction of Hindu and Jain cultures in the textbook frameworks. Speaking to the particular issue that most resonates with Jewish experience, we are writing to agree that the comparison of caste and slavery in the sixth grade history-social science framework should be removed.

As Jews we deeply understand how comparisons that draw inaccurate similarities across unique cultural experiences are harmful. Inappropriate comparisons of the Holocaust to abortion, gun control or animal rights debates have unfortunately become epidemic. Educators should be very careful of introducing this kind of simplistic thinking, particularly in middle school material.

Identity politics and intersectionality movements have created trends that focus alternatively on uniqueness or on perceived commonalities, but educators should not succumb to political trends when providing essential understanding of cultures to middle school students. In higher level academics it would be useful to discuss the distinction between slavery, caste and class, but to conflate these is intellectually inaccurate.

We encourage you to adopt the request to remove this comparison, so that our Hindu and Indian American students will not be at greater risk for bullying, and so that all students acquire accurate learning and solid analytical skills.

Sincerely,

Diane Fisher
Director, Community Relations Council
Jewish Federation of Silicon Valley

Marci Gerston
Co-Chair, Community Relations Council
Jewish Federation of Silicon Valley